Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 18 Number 3 March 2021

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, 14th March 2021: Nehru Zoological Park, 6.00AM. Trip Coordinator: Surekha Aitabathula (Mobile: 9949038532.

One of the largest Zoos in India, NZP sits next to the 200 year old Mir Alam Tank. Spread over 380 acres and housing 1500 species of birds and reptiles put together, the Zoo has always been a reliable birding destination for us. One can see Flycatchers, Bitterns, Thick-knees and many other species.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty.

Report: Participation in Bird Photography Workshop at Bharatpur, January 27-31, 2021

Jairamchander Pingle & Vikramdev Rao

A view of Keoladev Ghana National Park, Bharatpur (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

It was sometime in October 2020 that we got to know about Ms Rathika Ramasamy's Photography Masterclass Workshop to be held at the Keoladev Ghana National Park at Bharatpur over four days i.e. January 27-31, 2021. We were still in the midst of the Covid pandemic, of course, but the situation had eased a bit, so we felt that it may not be so much of an issue by the end of January.

Rathika asked us to send some of our bird photographs and give her some information about our interest in photography. She is one of India's foremost wildlife photographers, so we were happy that our request to join her workshop was accepted. We came to know later that she had apprehensions about our participation as we are both in our late 70s and the workshop had an arduous four day schedule, starting at 6:30AM and going on till 6:00PM. The cold temperatures – day temperatures in the low 20s, and night temperatures in single digits – were another factor. We would like to think that despite our age we dispelled any doubts that she had, as we were among the first ones up and ready to go every day!

Anyway, once we got confirmation of our participation, we booked our flights, deciding to reach Bharatpur via Jaipur rather than Delhi, the distance by road being almost the same.

The flight to Jaipur was uneventful but for the mandatory Covid protocol of wearing masks and face shields, besides a full body gown for the passenger in the middle seat. We were picked up at Jaipur airport and drove straight to Bharatpur. We arrived at the Iora guest house, where we were put up, by around 3:00PM, and met up with Rathika and the others.

There was an evening session covering all the intricacies of bird photography – it was quite a detailed session, with emphasis on camera settings, lighting at different times of the day and consequent changes in white balance settings, etc.

We were asked to give our preference for a single occupancy or shared cycle rickshaw. Both of us chose a single rickshaw as it would not be cramped and we would be free to roam as we wished. During the coming days, the rickshaw drivers not only helped us with our gear but also turned out to be quite knowledgeable about the flora and fauna in the park.

Sunrise (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

The next day, the rickshaws arrived at the guest house at 6:00AM, and we took off in the cold weather – which felt even colder because of the open rickshaw! We realized that we should have brought gloves to keep our hands warm for the first few hours. As the day progressed, the temperature became comfortable but we still kept our warm jackets on. The early morning haze made for some interesting photographs of the sun as it broke through. Once the haze cleared we were able to get some nice shots of the different birds that frequent the park.

Black-necked Stork (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Glossy Ibis (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Since we were independent of each other, we could stay as long as we wanted at a particular spot waiting for opportune moments to take photographs. There was also a lot of walking to do, as the rickshaws could not go into certain areas. Breakfast and lunch – simple but wholesome food – was sent by the guest house and we were given a time and a place where we were to meet. We had also been advised to carry plenty of snacks like chocolate bars, biscuits etc. in case we felt hungry in between.

At the end of the day, it was back to the guest house and a well-earned rest. We assembled again around 8:00PM to go over some of the photos taken during the day; Rathika reviewed and offered suggestions on what we could do differently for a better photograph.

Great White Pelican & Gadwall (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

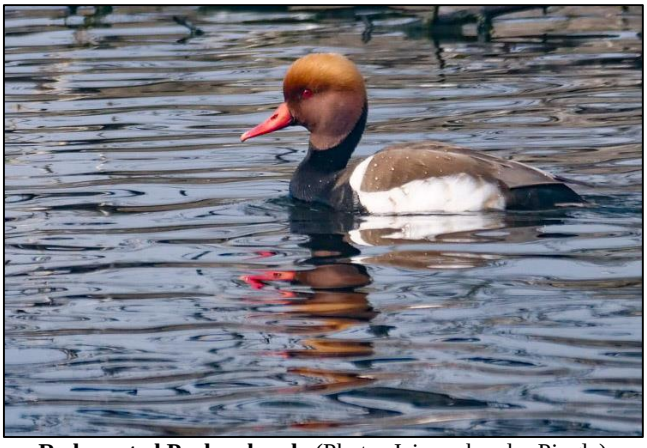
Ferruginous Duck male (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

A foggy morning (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

On the second day, the rickshaw drivers called to inform that there was heavy fog and visibility was almost zero, and suggested that we start out at 7:30AM. 7:30AM came around and the fog still hadn't fully lifted, but we ventured forth anyway.

Rhesus Macaque (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

As we entered the park, we found that a whole troop of Rhesus Macaque monkeys had come on to the road and had parked themselves there. The whole group got down and spent at least a half hour photographing them before moving on. It was great as we were able to get up close to them without scaring them away. The rest of the day was spent very much like the first, photographing birds both stationary and in flight.

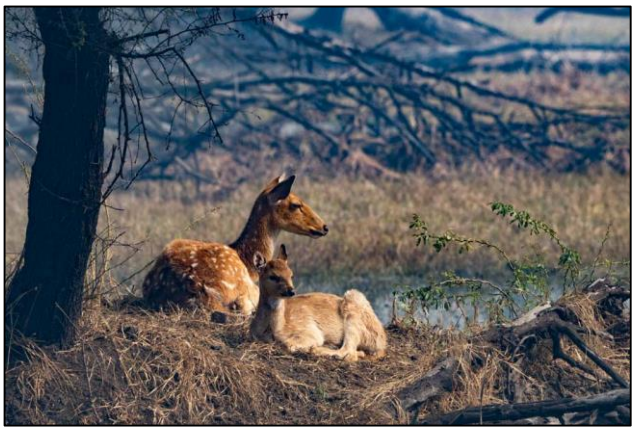


Red-crested Pochard male (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

On the third day, we went in early to take some shots of the sun rising over the swamps and through the haze, before proceeding with the usual routine of photographing birds during the day. Every evening, we would also wait until the sun set, hoping to get some shots of birds silhouetted against the setting sun.

A sunset in Bharatpur (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

The sun would set around 5:30PM, and we would get back to the guest house around 6:45PM for a short rest and a review session with the whole group. One major issue was keeping batteries charged, as apart from photographing for 12 hours every day, the batteries also tended to discharge faster because of the cold. Fortunately the power supply was stable.



Cheetal mother & fawn (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Golden Jackal (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Besides the birds, we did spot quite a few animals that inhabit the park as well – amongst them were Nilgai, Cheetal, Sambhar, Jackals, Foxes, Rhesus Macaques, Rock Pythons, Monitor Lizards, Hyenas etc.

Rock Python (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

On the fourth day, as we were due to leave by midday to catch our flight to Hyderabad, we ventured out into the park for a session in the morning, and this proved to be the highlight of our trip – suddenly, our rickshaw drivers-cum-guides heard the whooping of the Sarus Crane, which had eluded us until then! We quickly jumped into our respective rickshaws and went looking for the Cranes.

We saw them initially in the haze and spent a considerable amount of time taking photographs. Later, as the haze lifted, we were able to get some clearer shots of this beautiful bird, which is our largest flying bird and the state bird of Uttar Pradesh. It was a fitting finale to four days of a thoroughly satisfying and truly memorable visit to the Keoladev Ghana National Park at Bharatpur.

Sarus Crane pair (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

One of the distressing aspects of this trip was the wall listing all the birds bagged by various guests invited by the ruler over the years, before it was declared a National Park and given protected status. It serves to remind us of our bloodthirsty past, due to which animals and birds declined drastically with some reaching the verge of extinction. Thankfully today there is a consciousness of the need to work towards their preservation, and this wall serves as a reminder of what humanity is capable of doing to its fellow beings.

A list of birds seen by the group during the trip is given below:

S. No.	Common name	Scientific name	S. No.	Common name	Scientific name
1	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	19	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*
2	Great White (aka Rosy) Pelican	*Pelecanus onocrotalus*	20	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
3	Spot-billed Pelican	*Pelecanus philippensis*	21	Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*
4	Dalmatian Pelican	*Pelecanus crispus*	22	Black-necked Stork	*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*
5	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	23	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
6	Large Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	24	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*
7	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	25	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
8	Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	26	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*
9	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	27	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*
10	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	28	Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*
11	Striated Heron	*Butorides striata*	29	Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*
12	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	30	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*
13	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	31	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*
14	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	32	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*
15	Large Egret	*Ardea alba*	33	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
16	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	34	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*
17	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	35	Knob-billed (aka Comb) Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*
18	Black Bittern	*Ixobrychus flavicollis*	36	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*

S. No.	Common name	Scientific name	S. No.	Common name	Scientific name
37	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	76	Brown-headed Barbet	*Megalaima zeylanica*
38	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	77	Eurasian Wryneck	*Jynx torquilla*
39	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	78	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
40	Greater Spotted Eagle	*Aquila clanga*	79	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Leiopicus mahrattensis*
41	Indian Spotted Eagle	*Aquila hastata*	80	Singing Bushlark	*Mirafra cantillans*
42	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*	81	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*
43	Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*	82	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*
44	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	83	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
45	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	84	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
46	Eurasian Hobby	*Falco subbuteo*	85	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
47	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	86	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
48	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	87	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
49	Sarus Crane	*Grus antigone*	88	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
50	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	89	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
51	Indian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	90	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*
52	Grey-headed (aka Purple) Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	91	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
53	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	92	White-eared Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucotis*
54	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	93	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
55	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	94	Common Babbler	*Argya caudata*
56	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	95	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
57	Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	96	Red-breasted Flycatcher	*Ficedula parva*
58	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	97	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	*Culicicapa ceylonensis*
59	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	98	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
60	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	99	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
61	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	100	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*
62	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	101	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
63	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	102	Brown Rock Chat	*Cercomela fusca*
64	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	103	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
65	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	104	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
66	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	105	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
67	Indian Scops Owl	*Otus bakkamoena*	106	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
68	Dusky Eagle Owl	*Bubo coromandus*	107	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
69	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	108	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
70	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo a1his*	109	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
71	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	110	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
72	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	112	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
73	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	113	Rosefinch spp.	*Carpodacus spp*
74	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	114	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
75	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	115	Large Grey Babbler	*Argya malcolmi*

Some other photographs taken during the trip:

Bar-headed Goose
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Darter (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

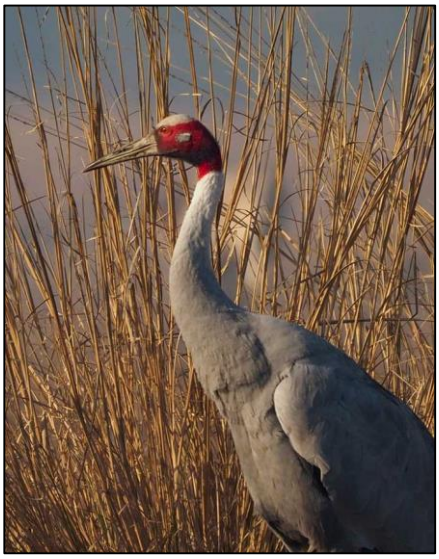
White-eared Bulbul
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Greater Spotted Eagle
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Eurasian Spoonbill
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Rhesus Macaque mother & young
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Crested Serpent Eagle
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)



Sarus Crane (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

White-tailed Lapwing
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Greylag Goose (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Northern Shoveler (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Ruddy Shelduck (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

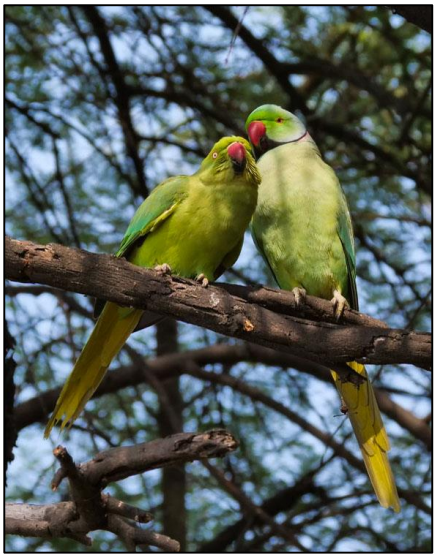
Painted Stork immature (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Northern Pintail (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Pied Kingfisher (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Darter with fish (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

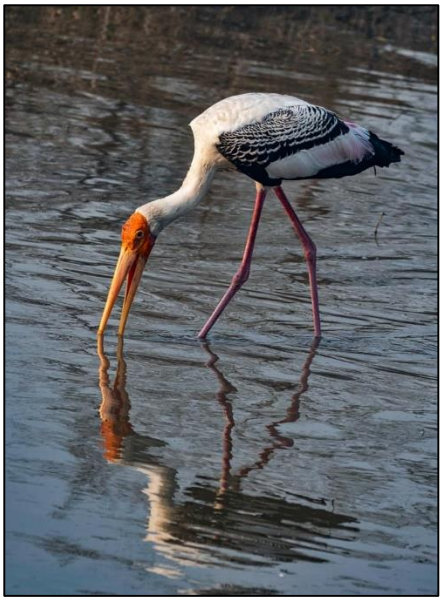
Black-necked Stork
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)



Rose-ringed Parakeet pair
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Grey Heron (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Spotted Owlet
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)



Painted Stork adult
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

White-throated Kingfisher
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Common Kingfisher
(Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Purple Heron with fish
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Little Egret (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Indian Golden Oriole (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Grey Wagtail (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Oriental Magpie Robin male (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Oriental Magpie Robin female (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

JUDGING BY THE AMOUNT OF TIME THAT SHE SPENDS STARING OUT THE WINDOW AT US, SHE'S EITHER A VERY COMMITTED ORNITHOLOGIST OR A VERY UNFOCUSED WRITER.

(From Facebook, March 26, 2021)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Common Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Common Teal male (L) and female (R) (Gajoldoba, West Bengal, January 25-26, 2021)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Anas*
Species: *A. crecca*
Size: 34-43 cm

Description & distribution: The Common Teal, also known as the Green-winged or Eurasian Teal, is a small dabbling duck that is quite common and widespread. It breeds across a wide range including almost all of Europe and Asia north of the Himalayan foothills, and parts of North Africa. It is generally migratory in winter, moving well south of its breeding range, except for the temperate parts of Europe, for instance the United Kingdom and Ireland, where breeding and wintering ranges may overlap. Large wintering populations are seen in the Nile Valley, the Mediterranean, the near East and Persian Gulf, East and South-east Asia, Myanmar, Korea, Japan and Taiwan. In the Indian subcontinent, where the Common Teal is seen in large numbers – Salim Ali called it 'perhaps our commonest migratory duck' – it is seen across Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The male Common Teal is a beautiful duck, with an overall pencil-grey body, and a chestnut head and throat with a broad metallic green band from behind the eye to the nape, bordered above and below by thin yellowish-white lines; one such line also extends from the eye below and along the base of the dark bill. It has a marked white scapular stripe running along the flanks, a yellowish patch on undertail coverts, and a buff breast with small brown spots. The belly is white on the centre, and marked elsewhere with thin, dense dark vermiculations, giving it a greyish appearance. It has a distinctive tri-coloured speculum – black, green and buff – that is especially conspicuous in flight, and dark grey legs. The underwing is whitish, with darker spotting on inner coverts and a dark leading edge. The non-breeding (eclipse) male is more like the female, more uniform in colour and with vestigial facial markings. The female is greyish- or yellowish-brown, with slightly darker wings and back, and greyish-olive or greyish-brown legs. It has a dark greyish-brown head, hind-neck and eye-stripe; the feather pattern consists of dense short streaks on head and neck, and scaly spots on the rest of the body. The overall appearance is somewhat like a small female Mallard or a Garganey minus the pale loral spot and dark cheek bar. The iris is brown and bill is dark grey in all birds, but the base sometimes shows some greenish or brownish at the base for the male, and some yellow for the female. The juvenile is much like the female, but with a stronger pattern. The birds moult in summer, including flight feathers, and are flightless for up to four weeks.

Habitat & behaviour: The Common Teal breeds in sheltered freshwater lakes, ponds and rivers with dense fringing vegetation in forested areas. In its wintering grounds, it prefers sheltered lakes and shallow inlets, lagoons and bays along the seashore, and sheltered wetlands with some vegetation or reeds nearby. It is a dabbling duck, feeding by foraging on the water surface, upending or sometimes diving to pick up food from under the surface, or even by grazing on the edges of the water body. Its main diet consists of grain, tender shoots of rice and marsh plants, grass and grass seeds, and aquatic vegetation, but when breeding, it shifts to a diet consisting mainly of aquatic invertebrates like insects and their larvae, crustaceans, mollusks and worms. It is diurnal during breeding season and crepuscular or nocturnal feeders during non-breeding.

Breeding pairs are formed in the wintering grounds and arrive together at the breeding grounds. During breeding season, the Common Teal can be aggressive and chase away other ducks that approach the nest, although in the non-breeding season, it is gregarious and can form large flocks. Its flight is fast and the large flocks wheeling in unison as they fly makes for a pretty sight.

Nesting: The Common Teal breeds generally between March and June. The nest is a deep hollow on the ground, near water and under dense vegetation, and lined with dry leaves, down feathers, reeds, rushes, grasses etc. The usual clutch consists of 7-11 oval, cream-coloured eggs with a glossy texture.

Local name: The Common Teal is known as *'Chhoti murghabi', 'Chowtee', 'Lohiya kerra'* or *'Patari'* in Hindi, *'Siravi'* or *'Kilawai'* in Tamil, *'Parza'* in Telugu, *'Yeranda'* in Malayalam, *'Nani batakh'* or *'Nani murghabi'* in Gujarati and *'Rohinik hansak'* in Sanskrit.

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*